

Tantalizing Patchwork

Thoughts Provoked by Memories of Leyburne Road - Part II

— Clyde Binfield —

The Binfields were Anglicans and Tories, I am inclined to think unthinkingly so. Richard Dickeson was a churchwarden at St Mary's, but actively Liberal. John Parton was a deacon at Zion; he too was Liberal. His daughter Florence was radically so. She told me that in

her teens she persuaded her father to vote for an Independent Labour candidate, on the grounds that being an army officer, and therefore a gentleman, he could not be too dangerous. At first sight that does not quite square with what seem to be the facts. Dover was ungrateful terrain for Liberals. There was no doubt about that. From 1889 to 1913 the town's MP was George Wyndham, an outstandingly able man. He was Dover's Tory candidate on eight occasions and was returned unopposed on five of them. In 1892, however, he was opposed by Major Eustace Edwards, R.A., and he is listed in McCalmont's invaluable Parliamentary Poll Book as a Gladstonian Liberal, which is hardly Labour. That must have been the election which my grandmother had in mind. Eustace Edwards lost handsomely but his workers included a future Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, then in his twenty-sixth year; my grandmother would have been in her fifteenth year. Had her memory played tricks on her?



*Leyburne Road, looking towards Victoria Park,
late 1950s*

The answer lies with Ramsay Macdonald. His biographer, David Marquand (1977), explains why. Eustace Edwards was indeed an army officer, now retired but less gentlemanly than my grandmother made out to her father. He was not a Gladstonian Liberal (the Partons

revered Mr. Gladstone), neither was he Independent Labour (the Independent Labour Party was only formed in January 1893) but he was the Labour Electoral Association's candidate and in the absence of a mainstream Liberal he offered the only opposition to George Wyndham. The Labour Electoral Association was worker; indeed trade-union, orientated but it aimed to work with Liberals and its policies, though radical, were not incompatible with theirs. Major Edwards, however, lacked electoral tact. He described Dover's Liberals as "a set of old Tory grandmothers"; after the 1892 election he gate-crashed a meeting of the Church Congress in the Town Hall, singing "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" just before the Bishop of Manchester (a Liberal bishop) was due to address it. The hero of the election in fact had been Ramsay Macdonald, to such effect that, when Eustace Edwards stood down as a candidate, Ramsay Macdonald was unanimously selected in his place. As it happened Macdonald did not stand for election in Dover; he moved on to Southampton but his brush with the town

occurred at a critical point in his political evolution.

Did it play any part in my grandmother's political evolution? I would like to think that she sneaked in to some of the meetings held in the Town Hall, so close to Priory Road, however unladylike that might have been. She was the only girl in her family, with three brothers, and her nickname was "Fireworks". But in recalling that election she made no reference to Ramsay Macdonald, despite the impact that he had on his hearers and on the local press. Perhaps at the time he was just another exciting young man; it was years later that he became a national figure, and when she told me about that election in 1892, Ramsay Macdonald had long been a lost leader, the man who had betrayed the Labour cause.

Even so, my grandmother's radical sympathies had deep roots. After the Liberal landslide of 1906 (which had little impact in Dover despite great electoral excitement and a respectable Liberal showing), she moved steadily leftwards, taking my grandfather with her, for Florence Parton and Arthur Goodfellow had been married on Christmas Day 1904. Theirs was the first wedding at the fine High Street Congregational Church, formed from the union of Russell Street (Arthur Goodfellow's church) and Zion (Florence Parton's church), and newly built across the road from the still new Connaught Hall. So much had come together.

None of this is quite so far from Leyburne Road (to which they moved in the 1930s, buoyed, I suspect, by helpful legacies from Medway aunts) as it might seem and it shows how rooted one might be in a particular place and yet how varied and colourful the patchwork quilt of family relationship and social opportunity (and social set-back too) could also be. Something of that has been lost for many of us.



Leyburne Road from its gardens, late 1950s artful, almost playful, with careful pretensions

When Leyburne Road and Harold Street managed to dust themselves down, enough remained of what was "pre-war" (in those first post-war years everything that was "pre-war" was held to retain a certain quality) to be worth savouring, and in the late 1940s and very early 1950s there was also freedom for a young boy to roam unaccompanied that would now be quite unthinkable. The Castle, then still garrisoned, was all of it mine; only the Keep and later the Underground Works charged for admission. Better still, the docks were surprisingly accessible. Here was a setting for regeneration.

I have begun with a war-time context. Already it has merged into a post-war context. Post-war Dover came tantalizingly close to recovery and regeneration. Two developments testify to this. One was the acquisition of Kearsney Abbey. Alas, the wonderfully gimcrack Gothic mansion had to go but the enchanting grounds became a public park. Was my grandfather still mayor at that point? My Labour-tinted family memory is that the Abbey was acquired thanks largely to his advocacy and over the dead bodies of Tory opposition. The other development was the building of The Gateway, inevitably if misleadingly described as "luxury flats" – they were

council flats, after all.

Were the shell-shocked William-and-Adelaide and early Victorian terraces of Marine Parade, Liverpool Lawn, and the rest really past salvation? At the time a clean sweep offered the chance of a new world. There was a competition for their replacement. I remember viewing the designs in the Town Hall. I still picture one; it was very seaside, almost Mediterranean, with its pitched and pantile roofs. Another submission was rather chillingly called "New Era Dwellings". What was built, The Gateway (Dalglish and Pullen, 1954-8), is crisply described in John Newman's updated Pevsner as a partly taken opportunity. It turns a bold face to the sea, a long, straight, and six-storey slab with a nine-storey slab curving round... But the two parts are not properly related to each other, nor are they visually enticing. Dull brown brick. The balconies that festoon the seaward side not spaced so as to impose rhythm on the bleak, flat walls...

That is a little hard but it is not unfair and the flats have worked. The people who moved into The Gateway, my parents and a great-aunt and uncle among them, were the sort who would once have lived in Leyburne Road and its environs. We should turn to their sort.

The last and not least characterful of the military men was a neighbour of my grandparents: Miller Higgs. He bred pigeons, kept dogs which barked non-stop (I recall Skipper, followed by Shandy), and was unfailingly jovial, gravel-voiced, and rubicund. He was a Tory and a Baptist, but no teetotaller. Much later I discovered that he was a building Higgs; the London firm of Higgs and Hill was one of the big Victorian building contractors, responsible for the Metropolitan Tabernacle, where the Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once

drew great crowds. Miller Higgs was also a highly regarded genealogist; the portraits in his dining-room attested to his sense of family.

The seafaring side was focused on pilots. Captains Kenward and Blaxland represented the Cinque Ports pilots; Captain McCaffrey, like my father, was North Sea. He was as red-faced as Miller Higgs, with a seafarer's gait; his wife was blonde and buxom. Such was our southern certainty that we could not begin to understand Captain McCaffrey's affection for Hull, to which eventually he returned, although not, I think, with Mrs McCaffrey.

There were still plenty of neighbouring pillars of the community, for while Leyburne Road, Godwyne Road, and Harold Street were not what they had been, Salisbury Road and Park Avenue had fared better, and Castle Avenue had fared best of all. One could understand why Castle Ward remained Dover's one impregnable Tory ward - Barton, Town and Pier, and Hougham, although frequently, even usually, Tory, offered hopeful ground for Labour in good years, Castle never. Thus I think of Mr Clark, short and Methodist, of Clark's Nurseries, who lived at the north end of Leyburne Road. There were the Clouts, round the corner in Godwyne Road. Their house, Godwyne Lodge, was a strange villa, tall, brown, and vaguely half-timbered in my memory, in the same style as Godwynehurst, just above it, which had been built, I think, as a rather select school but was now the YMCA. The Clouts were standard bearers for Dover's music. Mr Clout played the violin, Mrs Clout taught the piano. She spoke crisply and dressed bohemianly, in colours that matched her house. Her sharp humour and military teaching methods frightened me. The piano, as presented by her, was not for me. At the bottom of Godwyne Road, commanding the

approaches to Park Street and Park Avenue, as well as the two wings of Maison Dieu Road, Five Ways indeed, was the generously bayed Clyde House, where the Tolands lived and had their surgery. They were our doctors. The Tolands were Tories and High Church (St Bartholomew's); Dr Gertrude Toland was formidably qualified, and later became a Town Councillor, but it was her husband who had the bedside manner. Their son was at Winchester. On the whole it was Dover College and Kent College which provided alternatives to the Grammar School for boys whose parents could afford the fees and shuddered at the thought of a secondary modern. They were not academically demanding. Winchester, however, ranked with King's, Canterbury, as an independent school with academic edge.

On Salisbury Road, in plain, handsome, reddish-brown brick, detached houses lived the Youdens and the Ernest Chittys. Above them, half-timbered in Castle Avenue, lived the Charles Chittys. Castle Avenue's houses had names, a sonorous sequence of them: Kingswood, Sonnenberg (the Charles Chittys), Maryville (the Westwaters – he was the manager at Lloyd's Bank in the Market Square) and, most aspiring of all, Chatsworth, a half-timbered mini-manor, much more yeoman Kent than ducal Derbyshire but, although it was not remotely like the real thing, it deserved full marks for trying. It might seem that you could not fail if you lived in Castle Avenue. On the same side as Chatsworth, Kingswood, Sonnenberg, Maryville, Castania, and one or two more, lived Courtney Wethered, the Tory agent. His Cleve House was Castle Avenue scaled down to fit between the wars but it was as commandingly placed at the cusp of Castle Avenue and Godwyne Road as Chatsworth was at the cusp of Castle Avenue and Park Avenue or Clyde House was with its five ways at the bottom.

Of all their occupants it was the Youdens and Chittys who best exemplified pre-war Dover's professional and commercial people. My mother knew Mrs Youden through the revived Operatic and Dramatic Society. The Chittys were distinctive because of their unswerving Liberalism, their involvement in every good local cause from temperance to the YMCA, and their Unitarianism.

Ernest Chitty was a last link with the politics that preceded the First World War, when he had fought the sort of Toryism exemplified by the timber merchant, Sir William Crundall. "Man who Fought Bribery in Dover Politics Dies", was the headline in the Dover Express when Ernest Chitty's death was announced. He had been a solicitor. His firm, Bradley, Chitty and Scorer, introduces another name to note in Edwardian, inter-war, and post-war Dover. Bradleys were corn merchants, dyers, cleaners, and Baptists, as well as solicitors. They too were Liberals. The solicitor Bradley, Sir Montague, whose first name was Augustus, stood for Parliament in January 1910. He too failed to dislodge George Wyndham; I suspect that his knighthood was a consolation prize. His brother William, who was in corn but was also son-in-law and brother-in-law to dyeing and cleaning Scotts, lived in Taymouth House, very large and severe at the corner of Harold Street and Taswell Street, but that was well before my time and so is really another story. Nonetheless, the Bradleys, like the Chittys, illustrate the range and the texture of Dover's professional and commercial life at a time when its leading citizens still lived in their town. We should return to Ernest and his brother Charles Chitty.

Charles Chitty had been in charge of the family flour mills, which in their day had pioneered milling technology. White-bearded, twinkling, and upright, Charles Chitty drove an old-fashioned motor-car well

into his nineties except when he and Ernest were driven by their sister-in-law, also well advanced in years, silver-haired, slender, and upright. She was Miss McDougal, a Dover doctor's daughter, whom my grandmother always called Mattie McDougal, which seemed lacking in respect; Miss McDougal, so handsome and ramrod straight, was not at all a Mattie, but she and my grandmother had known each other since girlhood. Mattie McDougal was yet another Baptist, an instance of the place of Salem Baptist Church in Dover life. All was explained much later when I found that the McDougals were connected to the Coats family of Paisley, whose Coats Memorial Baptist Church is one of the grandest late Victorian churches of any denomination anywhere in Britain. The Coatses had prospered magnificently in sewing thread but Mattie McDougal's branch were the "Petty Coats", whose humbler (but still substantial) line was ham-curing. They were, however, all of them Baptists. In Dover Miss McDougal lived with Mrs McMaster in Godwyne Road; their house, St Stephen's, was large, double-fronted, in a yellowish-grey-brown brick, giving nothing away except that it was immaculately maintained.

I have already mentioned the Operatic and Dramatic Society, in whose post-war revival my mother played her part. I was from the first bewitched by Iolanthe, Yeoman of the Guard, and Pirates of Penzance, as well as by The Geisha and Quaker Girl. My mother was dramatic and not at all operatic but this allows me to introduce the Ridleys who lived in Victoria Park. Victoria Park was visible from Leyburne Road but not easily accessible from it. Here had been true terraced grandeur, its scale on a par with Waterloo Crescent. Its houses had long been mouldering into flats but the Ridleys' house remained undivided. The Ridleys were newcomers, with a style that matched their house, tall, spacey, and grandly faded.

Geoffrey Ridley was an architect. He rationalised and subdivided with considerable sensitivity the High Street Congregational Church where my parents and grandparents had been married, ensuring in the process that a proper stage was incorporated into its new church hall. He also stole the show as Sergius in the *Op and Dram's Arms and the Man*. Jane Ridley was its producer, a woman in the manner of Blackwood's Mrs Rathbone. Her productions aroused strong views. Mrs Ridley's admirers were convinced that her memorable Yeoman of the Guard had been unfairly savaged in the Dover Express.

There remain the widows and the maiden ladies, some of them, perhaps, examples of what my grandmother described with brisk sympathy as "pride, poverty, and pianos", nature's Conservatives. I think especially of four very different widows, all in Leyburne Road: Mrs Washington, Mrs George, Mrs Newman, and Mrs Maddocks.

Mrs Washington lived at Chaldercot, the large, detached, severely war-damaged and curiously featureless house high above the southern end of the road. Chaldercot was a Mowll house and Lois Washington was a Mowll. The Mowlls were solicitors, related to every notable family in Dover and beyond. Once Baptists, they had become the lowest of Low Churchmen, with Christ Church, on Folkestone Road, as their fiefdom. Mrs Washington's eldest brother became Archbishop of Sydney, which was perhaps as Low as you could get in the Anglican Communion. Mrs Washington was herself the widow of a Low Church parson, Canon Marmaduke Washington. I wish that I had known then that she was Mrs Marmaduke Washington but we irreverently called her Mrs Washpot (a Biblical reference) and my aunt described her daily progress with her small dog along Leyburne Road as like that of a ship in full sail. She looked a hundred,

but a billowing, stately hundred, yet can only have been in her earlier fifties. She and my grandmother would talk, if they met, about the Reformation, of which they both approved.

Mrs George, or Mrs Franklin George as she preferred to be called, and Mrs Newman were contrasts. They lived either side of us after we had moved from my grandparents' house to number 28. Mrs George, who came from Chesterfield, was cheerful, loud-voiced, and played the organ at the Castle Church, which she was convinced had been used for continuous worship since Roman times; it annoyed her that the Vatican did not respond to her requests for proof. Her daughter Rosemary was a Channel swimmer, not the first woman but certainly one of the first. Mrs Newman was much more self-contained; she was a careful gardener (Mrs George's gardening was more hit-and-miss) and had a newsagent's shop in Ladywell, compact but excellently stocked, full of sweets as well as magazines and packets of cigarettes.

That leaves Mrs Maddocks, who lived above Miller Higgs. I recall her as tall, elegantly thin, and well-spoken. She taught at Broadleas, the truly extraordinary little school nestling in the lee of the Castle where my aunt was head teacher. At least, Mrs Maddocks taught there until she remarried. That event was at St George's, Hanover Square then still a fashionable place for London weddings. Her new husband was a parson whose engagingly medieval name matched hers. She was Blanche, he was Hubert, and French with two ffs: Hubert Ffrench. That was classy.

Of the maiden ladies, most of them daughters of solid local tradesmen, I would pick out ten. The Miss Kettners lived next to my grandparents. They too had the whole house. I can just about recall their father; the

infinitely frail Mr Kettner. I am sure that they were Austrians but Olga and Hilda Kettner spoke perfect, accentless English. They dressed with quietly immaculate precision; their garden too, like their clothes, was without equal in Leyburne Road for quietly immaculate precision. They were complemented by the Miss Giggs, retired teachers who lived no less immaculately in an ample semi-detached villa in Harold Terrace. One was jolly and round, the other was much more ascetic. Their family had been High Street Congregationalists and one of the Miss Giggs could still, very occasionally, be seen there. Then there was Miss Killick, an efficient looking Baptist who lived in one of the surviving terraced houses in Harold Street; she was a Killick of Killick and Back, whose outfitters shop had been next to Binfield Bros in the Market Square.

There remain Miss Embry, Miss Crundall, the Misses East, and Miss Elnor. Miss Embry, a parson's daughter, small, dark, and High Church, lived in Leyburne Road's yellow-brick Guilford Terrace. She had a famous brother, Air Chief Marshal Sir Basil Embry, a Bomber Squadron pilot of "extreme personal recklessness". It took some imagination to impute his derring-do into her restrained demeanour. Miss Crundall, from Maison Dieu Road, tall and thin as so many of them seem to have been – which is how English women of a certain type often were – comes into this picture in part because she was the daughter of the reprehensible Sir William and in part because she greatly enriched the Op and Dram's wardrobe. I still have a photograph of my mother in Dramatic mode (taken of course by Lambert Weston) wearing one of Lady Crundall's late-Victorian gowns, plum-red silk and intended to impress. Miss Crundall might also have had links with Guiding. The Misses East and Miss Elnor certainly had, and I close with them.

The Misses East were the daughters of W.H. East of the School of Art, the man who had painted my mariner great-grandfather Goodfellow alongside their brother. I understood that Mr East had designed Eastlea, their house in Maison Dieu Road which, with its purpose-built studio, must rank in all senses as the town's best true Arts-and-Crafts house; it would fit so easily into Bedford Park, London's proto-Arts-and-Crafts suburb, or into the artier parts of Hampstead. One of the sisters always seemed very frail but the other, though slight, was alert and upright. She had been a Guider, one of those to whom my mother, who was a keen Guide and a first-rate Guide Captain, always deferred as "Madam". That was how you addressed Guide Commissioners; their smart uniform was more than a cut above a Guide Captain's sensible gear. Miss Elnor also fitted that category. She was very much "Madam". Her house was Leyburne House, opposite Chaldercot, a well-positioned, discreetly understated and consequently rather superior detached house. Miss Elnor's father, Canon Elnor, had been Vicar of St Mary's and therefore Dover's senior Anglican clergyman. Patricia Elnor (can she have been named after

Princess Patricia of Connaught? Dover seems to have taken a proprietary interest in the Connaughts ever since the young Duke had briefly lodged, while on duty, in Waterloo Crescent) had one other claim to fame: she kept a uniformed maid, as I discovered when taking a note from my mother to Miss Elnor and the maid opened the door and told me to wait. That really was a glimpse into an already vanished world.

There could be no better place than to end this excursion into memory than with Leyburne House at the end of Leyburne Road.



Leyburne House

COWGATE CEMETERY

Jeremy Cope

Our maintenance work continues as usual with the cemetery looking well – a lovely spot overlooking the town and well worth a visit. For those who would like to join our working parties do please contact me – my contact details are on the front inside cover. Usually we work the first Thursday and second Saturday in the month from 9.00a.m to noon with of course a tea/coffee break.

Preliminary diary is:

Month	Thursday	Saturday
November	2nd	11th
December	7th	16th
2018		
January	4th	13th
February	1st	10th
March	1st	10th